



**Judicial Council of California**  
**Administrative Office of the Courts**

**Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures**

Procedure No.  
Page

**FIN 1.01**  
1 of 14

**TRIAL COURT ORGANIZATION**

**POLICY NUMBER: AOC FIN 1.01**

**Original Release**

**April 2001**

Originator:

**Administrative Office of the Courts**

Effective Date:

July 1, 2005

Revision Date:

December 2, 2004



# Trial Court Organization

## 1.0 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to describe the organizational structure, duties and responsibilities, and authority of the organizations that make up the State of California trial court system.

## 2.0 Policy Statement

The Judicial Council of California is the governing body of the California court system, including the trial courts. Consistent with the requirements of the Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Funding Act of 1997 (AB 233) and other legislation, the Judicial Council has established financial rules that allow the trial courts to operate responsibly.

Internet links to the Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Funding Act of 1997 and other relevant legislation are provided in Appendix A.

## 3.0 Table of Contents

- 1.0 Purpose
- 2.0 Policy Statement
- 3.0 Table of Contents
- 4.0 Application
- 5.0 Definitions
- 6.0 Text
  - 6.1 The Judicial Council
  - 6.2 The Administrative Office of the Courts
  - 6.3 The Trial Court
  - 6.4 Trial Court Operating Standards
- 7.0 Associated Documents

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 3 of 14
--	---------------------------------	--

## 4.0 Application

This procedure applies to all trial court officials and employees.

## 5.0 Definitions

The terms defined below apply to this policy and are for the express purpose of interpreting this policy.

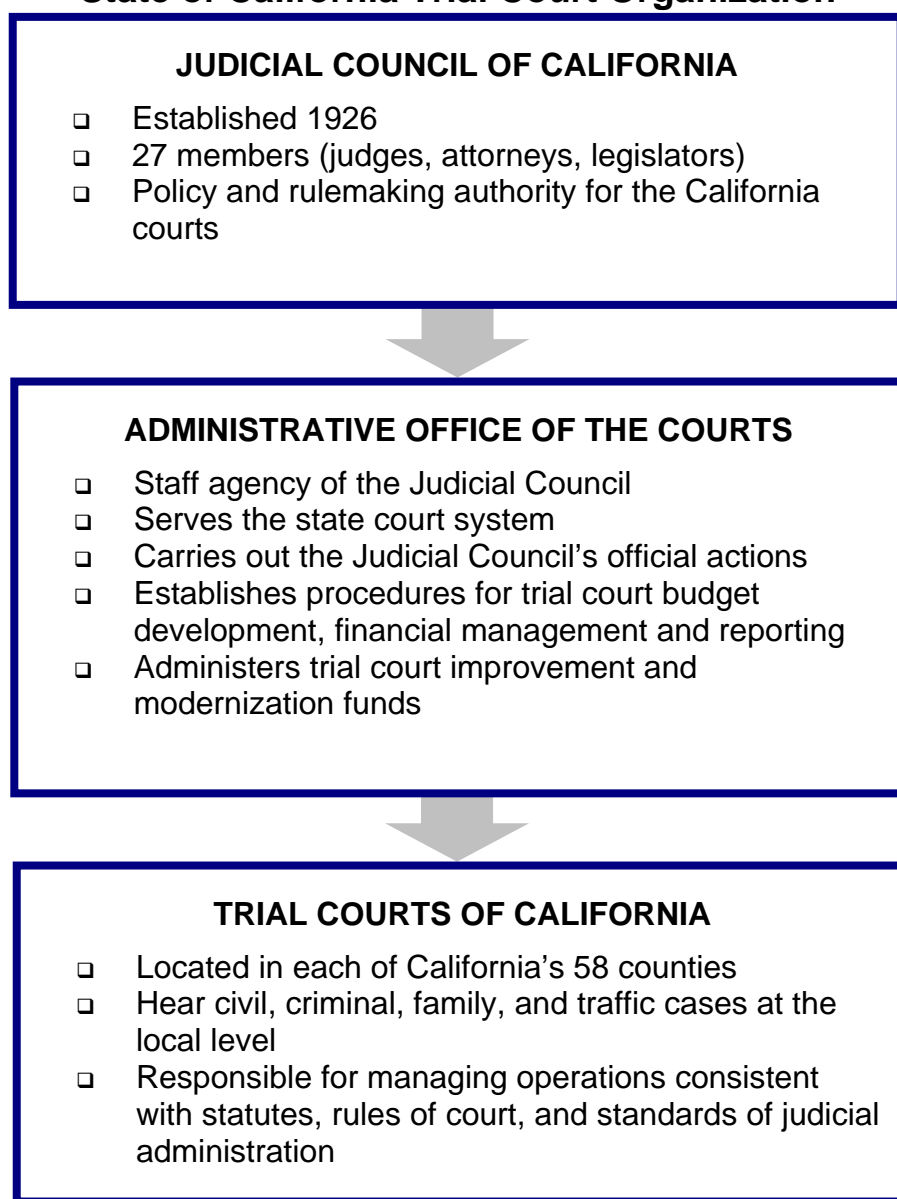
1. **Administrative Director of the Courts.** The person responsible for implementing the directives of the Judicial Council and developing policies and procedures for the creation and implementation of the annual judicial budget. The Director also presents the judiciary's budget to the Governor and Legislature.
2. **Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).** The organization established by the Judicial Council to serve the courts of California and provide them with administrative support.
3. **Judicial Council.** The governing body of the California courts. Under the leadership of the Chief Justice, it is responsible for ensuring the consistent, independent, impartial, and accessible administration of justice.
4. **Lockyer-Isenberg Trial Court Funding Act of 1997 (AB 233).** Law enacted by the State of California legislature taking effect on January 1, 1998. Under this law, the funding of the trial courts is consolidated at the state level to ensure equal access to justice throughout California. Key provisions of the law include giving the legislature authority to make appropriations and giving the Judicial Council of California authority to allocate funds to state courts (refer to Appendix A).

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 4 of 14
---	---------------------------------	--

## 6.0 Text

The trial court is subject to the policies and rules established by the Judicial Council and administered through its staff agency, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), as shown in the figure below.

### State of California Trial Court Organization



Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 5 of 14
--	---------------------------------	--

## **6.1 The Judicial Council**

### **6.1.1 Organization of the Judicial Council**

1. The Judicial Council of California was established in 1926 by article VI, section 6 of the state Constitution. The 27-member council has policy and rule-making authority over the California courts, the nation's largest court system. The California Constitution directs the Judicial Council to provide guidelines for the courts, make recommendations annually to the Governor and the Legislature, and adopt and revise California's Rules of Court regarding court administration, practice, and procedure.
2. The Judicial Council operates largely through the establishment of committees, task forces, and agencies such as the AOC to carry out its responsibilities, delegating authority as-needed to accomplish its mission.
3. The Judicial Council is composed of the following members:
  - a. The Chief Justice, who chairs the Judicial Council.
  - b. Fourteen judges appointed by the Chief Justice.
  - c. Four attorneys appointed by the State Bar Board of Governors.
  - d. One member from each house of the Legislature.
  - e. Six advisory members, including representatives of the California Judges Association and state court administrative agencies.

### **6.1.2 Duties and Responsibilities of the Judicial Council**

The Judicial Council's duties and responsibilities are defined by the state Constitution, statutes, and legislation. With respect to the

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 6 of 14
--	---------------------------------	--

operation and fiscal management of the trial courts, the Judicial Council has the responsibility and authority to:

- a. Adopt a budget and allocate funding for the trial courts.<sup>1</sup>
- b. Adopt policies and procedures governing practices and procedures for budgeting in the trial courts.<sup>2</sup>
- c. In consultation with the State Controller, maintain appropriate regulations for recordkeeping and accounting by the courts.<sup>3</sup>
- d. Adopt rules ensuring that, upon written request, the trial courts provide, in a timely manner, information relating to the administration of the courts, including financial information.<sup>3</sup>
- e. Prepare budget requests for the courts and oversee the allocation and management of the court system's budget.
- f. Allocate resources in a manner that enables the trial courts to carry out their functions, and promote the implementation of statewide policies, efficiencies and cost saving measures in court operations.
- g. Adopt a schedule for allocating funds to individual trial courts.
- h. Provide for uniform entry, storage, and retrieval of court data relating to civil cases and court administration.
- i. Promulgate rules for the establishment of efficient trial court management.

### **6.1.3 Rules of Court**

1. Under article VI, section 6 of the Constitution of California, the Judicial Council is authorized to improve the administration of justice. The Judicial Council has constitutional authority to “*adopt rules for court administration, practice and procedure not*

<sup>1</sup> Government Code 68502.5 (c).

<sup>2</sup> Government Code 77202 (b).

<sup>3</sup> Government Code 77206.

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 7 of 14
--	---------------------------------	--

*inconsistent with statute.”* California Rules of Court have the force of law.

2. The state legislature can also authorize the Judicial Council to develop and implement rules, policies and procedures addressing specific issues.
3. The Judicial Council’s Standards of Judicial Administration contain recommendations for court practices and procedures. The standards provide guidelines and include goals that courts and judges are urged to attain.

## **6.2 The Administrative Office of the Courts**

### **6.2.1 Organization of the AOC**

1. The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is a staff agency that carries out the Judicial Council’s official actions. The AOC’s charter is to serve the courts for the benefit of all Californians by advancing excellence, leadership, and service in the administration of justice.
2. The AOC’s authority to develop and implement management and administrative programs, rules, policies, and procedures is delegated by the Judicial Council, which also sets guidelines for the AOC to operate within.
3. The AOC organization is led by the **Administrative Director of the Courts** who is responsible for:
  - a. Implementing the directives of the Judicial Council.
  - b. Developing policies and procedures for the creation and implementation of a yearly budget for the judiciary.

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 8 of 14
--	---------------------------------	--

- c. Presenting the judiciary's budget in negotiations with the Governor and the Legislature.
  - d. Ensuring that the fiscal affairs of the trial courts are managed efficiently, effectively and responsibly.<sup>4</sup>
- 4. The **Chief Financial Officer (CFO)** of the AOC, under the direction of the Administrative Director of Courts, administers the budget policies and procedures developed by the Administrative Director of the Courts and approved by the Judicial Council. The CFO:
  - a. Develops and administers the budget preparation process and ensures the submission of a final budget recommendation for the judiciary to the Department of Finance each year.
  - b. Develops a manual of procedures for the budget request process, revenues, expenditures, allocations, and payments.
  - c. Monitors all revenues and expenditures for the judiciary.
  - d. Develops recommendations for fiscal priorities and the allocation and reallocation of funds.
  - e. Assists the courts and the Administrative Director of the Courts in preparing and managing budgets.
- 5. The **Finance Division** provides an integrated program of budget planning, asset management, accounting, procurement, contract management, internal audit, and facility coordination to the judicial branch.
- 6. **Serranus** is the Judicial Council's non-public Web site for California judges and judicial branch personnel. The Web site is named after Serranus Clinton Hastings, the first Chief Justice of California. Since its inception in 1997, Serranus has expanded to

---

<sup>4</sup> Government Code 77206 (a).



Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 9 of 14
--	---------------------------------	--

include a wide range of information relevant to all levels of judicial branch personnel, including:

- a. Information on Judicial Council business, including meeting agendas and minutes.
- b. Proposed rules of court and Judicial Council forms.
- c. Updates on special court programs and projects, including e-filing, grants, the Judicial Branch Statistical Information System (JBSIS), local court planning, Proposition 36, and records management.
- d. Reference materials such as this manual and selections authored by judges.
- e. Calendars and catalogs of the Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER).
- f. CJER Benchguides, publications, JBRadio distance learning programs, and lists of audio and videotapes.
- g. Links to judicial branch forum discussions and other sites.

The Serranus Web site is password-protected. Access to the site is restricted to judges and judicial branch employees. To gain access, eligible employees must register by completing the "Serranus Account Request" form and submitting it to the AOC's Information Services Division. The form is provided at the end of this procedure.

### **6.2.2 Duties and Responsibilities of the AOC**

1. The primary responsibility of the AOC is to carry out the directives of the Judicial Council. With respect to the fiscal management of the trial courts, the AOC has been granted the authority to:

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 10 of 14
--	---------------------------------	---

- a. Establish budget procedures and an annual schedule of budget development and management consistent with Judicial Council rules.
- b. Set forth the criteria for the Judicial Council's trial court budget request.
- c. Administer the Trial Court Improvement Fund along guidelines set by the Judicial Council.
- d. Administer the Judicial Administration Efficiency and Modernization Fund along guidelines set by the Judicial Council.

## 6.3 The Trial Court

### 6.3.1 Organization of the Trial Court

1. Trial courts are located in each of California's 58 counties.
2. The trial court organization structure is as follows:
  - a. Each trial court is headed by a **Presiding Judge**, who is ultimately responsible for all of the actions of the court.
  - b. The **Court Executive Officer**, who reports directly to the Presiding Judge, is responsible for the management and administration of court operations.
  - c. The trial court may also employ a **Court Fiscal Officer**, who is responsible for the detailed management of the court's financial and accounting functions.
  - d. The trial court operations are typically organized based on the programs that the courts conduct within the county that they reside in. Examples of court programs are General Civil, Family Law, Probate, Small Claims, Traffic, Criminal, Juvenile and miscellaneous programs.

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 11 of 14
--	---------------------------------	---

- e. The trial court shall prepare an organizational chart that should be updated at least once per year.

### **6.3.2 Duties and Responsibilities of the Trial Court**

1. Under AB 233 (GC 77001) the Judicial Council is authorized to “adopt rules which establish a decentralized system of trial court management”. These rules shall ensure:
  - a. Local authority and responsibility of the trial courts to manage day-to-day operations.
  - b. Countywide administration of the trial courts.
  - c. The authority and responsibility of the trial courts to manage all of the following, consistent with statute, rules of court, and standards of judicial administration:
    - i. Annual allocation of funding, including policies and procedures about moving funding between functions or line items or programs.
    - ii. Local personnel plans, including the promulgation of personnel policies.
    - iii. Processes and procedures to improve court operations and responsiveness to the public.
    - iv. The trial courts of each county shall establish the means of selecting presiding judges, assistant presiding judges, executive officers or court administrators, clerks of court, and jury commissioners.
  - d. Trial court input to the Judicial Council budget process.
  - e. Equal access to justice throughout California utilizing standard practices and procedures whenever feasible.

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 12 of 14
--	---------------------------------	---

## 6.4 Trial Court Operating Standards

1. The trial court is subject to the rules and policies established by the Judicial Council to promote uniformity and efficiency among the courts within a decentralized system of trial court management. The Judicial Council has delegated authority to the AOC to develop and implement programs for trial court budget development, fiscal management, financial reporting, and the administration of certain funds that benefit the trial courts.
2. The trial court shall manage its operations within the limits established by Judicial Council policies and rules, and the programs developed and implemented by the AOC. Alternative procedures must be documented, incorporated into the local trial court manual, and distributed to court personnel. Any alternative procedure that is different from what is included in the Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures Manual or your county's policy document must be approved by the AOC prior to its implementation. The AOC's Internal Audit and Trial Court ~~Fiscal Services~~ Accounting Systems units will review alternative procedures. Undocumented procedures or those not approved by the AOC will not be considered valid for audit purposes.

## 7.0 Associated Documents

Trial Court Organization Chart  
Serranus Account Request Form

## Serranus Web site address: <http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov>

Serranus is the **non-public** Web site exclusively for California judges and judicial branch personnel. The Web site is named after Serranus Clinton Hastings, the first Chief Justice of California.

Serranus began as a publication vehicle for the Judicial Council's Education Division. Since its inception in 1997, Serranus has expanded to include a wide range of information relevant to all levels of judicial branch personnel, including:

- Information on Judicial Council business, including meeting agendas and minutes;
- Proposed rules of court and Judicial Council forms;
- Updates on special court programs and projects, including e-filing, grants, the Judicial Branch Statistical Information System (JBSIS), local court planning, Proposition 36, and records management;
- Reference materials and selections authored by judges;
- Calendars and catalogs of the Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER);
- CJER Benchguides, publications, JBRadio distance learning programs, and lists of audio and videotapes;
- Links to judicial branch forum discussions and other sites.

### **Register for Serranus!**

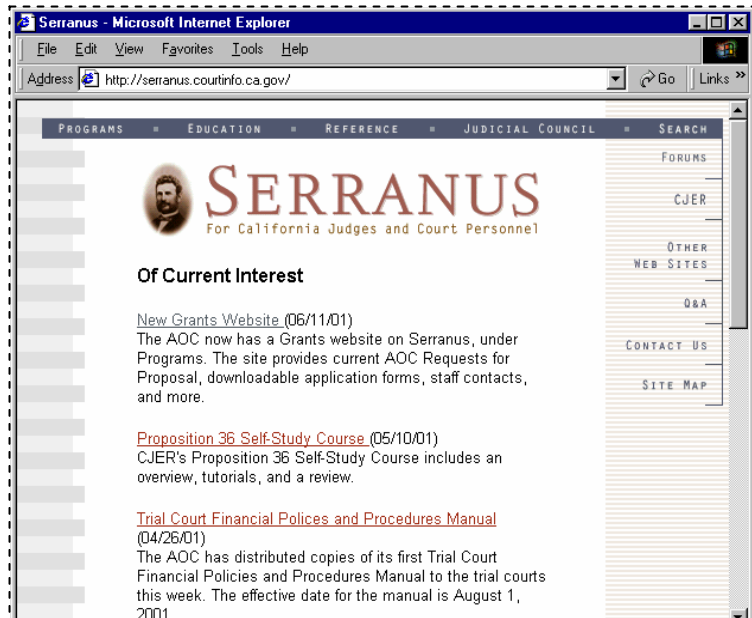
The Serranus Web site is password-protected; access to the site is restricted to judges and judicial branch employees.

To gain access, each eligible employee must register by completing the "Serranus Account Request" form and submitting it to the AOC's Information Services Division.

### **Questions?**

Phone: 415-865-7480

E-mail: [serranus@jud.ca.gov](mailto:serranus@jud.ca.gov)



### **Serranus Account Request**

The Serranus web site is restricted to access by judges and judicial branch employees; all other requests for accounts are subject to denial. To gain access to Serranus, each eligible employee must complete this form and submit it to the AOC's IS Division (see below). Once the request has been processed and the account has been established, the requestor will be mailed a confirmation notice and log on information.

**ALL fields are required. Please type or print clearly.**

NAME:		
First Name	MI	Last Name
TITLE:		POSITION:
COURT:	Supreme Court      Appellate Court, District # _____, Division # _____ Superior Court of California, County of _____	
WORK ADDRESS:		
City	State	Zip
PHONE: ( ) _____	FAX: ( ) _____	
EMAIL: _____		
PASSWORD: _____		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Password must be between 6 and 16 characters long.</li><li>▪ At least two characters must be alphabetic, and at least one character must be numeric or a special character, such as an asterisk or ampersand. Examples: water7, *solar</li></ul>		
NOTE: Logon and password alphabetic characters are all lower case.		

Trial Court Financial Policies and Procedures	<b>Trial Court Organization</b>	Procedure No. <b>FIN 1.01</b> Page: 14 of 14
--	---------------------------------	---

## Serranus Account Request

The Serranus Web site is restricted to access by judges and judicial branch employees; all other requests for accounts are subject to denial. To gain access to Serranus, each eligible employee must complete this form and submit it to the AOC's IS Division (see below). After the request has been processed and the account established, the requestor will receive a confirmation notice and log-in information.

**ALL fields must be completed. Please type or print clearly.**

NAME:					
	Hon., Mr., Ms., Mrs.	First Name	MI	Last Name	
TITLE:			TYPE OF USER:	<input type="radio"/> AOC Staff <input type="radio"/> JC Member <input type="radio"/> Judicial Officer	<input type="radio"/> Court Staff <input type="radio"/> Court Management <input type="radio"/> Commissioner
COURT:	<input type="radio"/> Supreme Court <input type="radio"/> Appellate Court, District # _____, Division # _____ <input type="radio"/> Superior Court of California, County of _____				
WORK ADDRESS:	_____ City _____ State _____ ZIP _____				
PHONE:	(____) _____		FAX:	(____) _____	
E-MAIL:	_____				
PASSWORD:	_____ ■ Password must be between 6 and 16 characters long. ■ At least two characters must be alphabetic, and at least one character must be numeric or a special character, such as an asterisk or ampersand. Examples: water7, *solar NOTE: Password alphabetic characters are all lowercase.				

I acknowledge that the information provided above is true and correct. I agree not to distribute my log-in information.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Requestor **[REQUIRED]**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Court Executive Officer **[REQUIRED for courts]**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Print, sign, and mail or fax the completed form to (no e-mails accepted):**

Fax to:  
415-865-7499

Mail to:  
Attn: Serranus Accounts  
Administrative Office of the Courts, Information Services Division  
455 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94102-3688

**Questions?** Contact the Information Services Division at [serranus@jud.ca.gov](mailto:serranus@jud.ca.gov) or 415-865-7480.  
Please review the usage terms of the Serranus Web Site at <http://serranus.courtinfo.ca.gov/usage.htm>